After World War I, millions of African Americans left the South to find a better life in the North. In New York, Chicago, and Detroit, they found good-paying jobs, a middle class of African American professionals, and a growing political voice. About 200,000 migrants from the South and immigrants from the Caribbean settled in New York City’s Harlem neighborhood. One of these immigrants was a Jamaican named Marcus Garvey. Seeing that blacks were treated poorly everywhere, he created a “Back to Africa” movement and urged black unity and separation of the races.

The 1920s saw the birth of a new musical form, jazz. Jazz is a truly indigenous American music. It emerged in the South as a combination of African American and European musical styles. Jazz became famous around the world thanks to the talents of musicians such as trumpet player Louis Armstrong. Singer Bessie Smith was so popular that she became the highest-paid African American entertainer of the 1920s.

The decade also saw the Harlem Renaissance, an outpouring of art and literature that explored the African American experience. Among its most famous writers was Claude McKay, whose novels and poems were militant calls for action. Langston Hughes celebrated African American culture. Zora Neale Hurston wrote about women’s desire for independence.

The Great Depression ended the Harlem Renaissance. However, the pride and unity it created provided a foundation for the future civil rights movement.

Review Questions
1. Why did many African Americans migrate north?
2. What was the “Back to Africa” movement?